



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, May 8, 2012

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Peruzzotti

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2012-0129 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meeting of April 23, 2012 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Watson, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2012-0130 Noank Fire District Presentation on Noank School Reuse

Discussed

Frank Socha and members of the Noank School Reuse Committee introduced themselves to the Council. Mr. Socha noted the efforts of the Noank School Reuse Task Force, which was led by Councilor Flax. The Council adopted the recommendations of the Task Force which included allowing the Noank Fire District six months to present a plan for reuse of the school. The Noank School Reuse Committee has toured the property and held public meetings. The consensus of the Committee was that there was nothing about the property that would disallow them from making use of the building for community purposes. It was noted that the Committee did not hire any consultants to evaluate the building. On April 5th, the Committee passed a motion by a vote of 46 to 9 to authorize the Executive Committee of the Noank Fire District to enter into an agreement with the Town of Groton to lease the Noank School property.

In the initial phase, Noank would use the property and assume operational costs. The space would be used for public meetings; Noank Mystic Band practice; and storage for the Noank Water Company. Some cleaning and minor repairs are required. Noank is looking into installing a new communications antenna. It is hoped that funds will be available to hire a consultant in the future.

Over the longer term, Noank would look for additional funding support for major work such as a new heating system, a functioning kitchen, and a roof. Mr. Socha noted there has been a lot of community involvement in this process and ideas shared. Historically, the building has been used as a community space and Mr. Socha believe this plan will continue that purpose.

In response to questions from Councilor O'Beirne, Mr. Socha stated that Noank will allow entities outside of the Fire District to use the space. Discussion followed on the potential to charge fees. Mr. Socha expects that the lease agreement would be similar to the leases for the Colonel Ledyard School and Eastern Point School sites (30 years with extensions).

Councilor Streeter questioned recreational opportunities. Mr. Socha stated that the basketball courts will remain, but the property is not big enough for fields.

Councilor Flax noted that cost estimates for repairs to the building were available and discussed during the Task Force's deliberations, but it seems that the Noank Fire District believes that reuse of the building can be done cheaper and piecemeal. Councilor Flax asked why that idea wasn't more developed by the Noank residents during the Task Force meetings. If it is going to be cheaper to reuse the building, the Town could use it as a community building. Mr. Socha noted that Noank's Committee discussed smaller and/or multiple heating systems, or individual room units. Councilor Flax stated it is clear that Noank residents have an affinity for the property and Noank should be allowed a chance to reuse the property, but there should be a time limit or benchmark included in the lease.

Councilor Flax asked about liability insurance. Town Manager Oefinger noted that both the Town and Noank would have to have insurance. Mr. Socha noted it would be added to Noank's existing policy. Mr. Socha explained that his desire is to rehabilitate the building until there's no point in putting any more money into it.

Councilor Antipas asked what would happen if the Fire District changed its mind about the building down the road. Mr. Socha stated that any major changes to the property will have to be addressed in the lease and in partnership with the Town.

Councilor Watson asked if work at this site would be subject to prevailing wage and the Town Manager stated yes, but it may not meet the dollar threshold. With respect to fields, the Town Manager noted that the property may accommodate a neighborhood pick up field, but he does not envision there ever being organized fields on this property.

Councilor Johnson asked how the April 5th meeting that was held by the Fire District on this property was posted and Mr. Socha responded that it was advertised in the newspaper and with flyers in Noank village.

Mayor Somers asked about the zoning for the property. Mr. Socha noted that a change was made in zoning to require a public hearing for any use on the property which is zoned R20 (residential). If the Town decided to retain the property for uses similar to what is being proposed by the Fire District, Mr. Socha stated the Town would have to approach the Zoning Commission. Mayor Somers noted that she struggles with the idea that objections that were raised by residents to the temporary location of the Senior Center at Noank School, but not to this proposal by the Fire District. She said it appears exclusionary. Mr. Socha stated the Fire District has not historically operated that way. Traffic was discussed at the Noank Committee's meeting and it was noted that there were no traffic issues when the Senior Center was at the school.

Mayor Somers stated that if the Fire District proposes significant improvements to the building, they should not come back to the Town asking for money. Also, she would expect outside groups

to have access to the building, otherwise she could not support leasing the property to Noank.

Mr. Sylvester, a member of the Noank committee and neighbor of the school, stated it is important to have the support of the Noank Fire District community. Mayor Somers feels the 'community' is the entire Town. Mr. Socha stated the Town would be treated like any other applicant if they came before the Zoning Commission. Councilor Flax noted that the zoning was specifically changed for that property which is where some of the criticism comes in.

Mr. Socha stated the next step is for the Fire District to gain approval for \$30,000 to move forward and then to develop a lease with the Town. He suggested that a Memorandum of Understanding to use the property could be signed while the lease is developed to allow Noank to get into the building and cleaning and maintenance. At some point in the future, the Fire District would have to have special meeting(s) to authorize funding for improvements. They will also look for funding from other sources. The goal is to use the building at a minimal cost to the Fire District, but with the recognition that they have a responsibility to improve the property.

Councilor Schmidt asked about selling the property rather than leasing it. Mr. Socha stated that the previous Town Council supported having the property remain in public ownership.

Councilor Antipas suggested that if the Town still owns the property, it will trigger the need for Zoning Commission approval, even if it is leased to the Fire District. Mr. Socha does not believe that Noank Zoning Commission approval would be necessary for the Fire District as long as the uses are similar to what is done at the fire house.

Councilor Flax requested that a formal plan be presented to the Town Council as it is developed over the next year. He noted that if the Noank School Reuse Task Force had thought that reusing the building would cost less than \$600,000, it might have made a different recommendation. The building should provide value for both Noank and the Town of Groton.

Mr. Socha expressed a desire to have the building become part of the greater Groton community again and reiterated that Noank has not operated in an exclusionary manner in the past.

Mayor Somers summarized the next steps. Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the Council take some time think about this issue and have a discussion about how to structure the lease and/or Memorandum of Understanding. The item will be placed on the next Committee of the Whole agenda. A tour of the school can be arranged if so desired by the Council. Mayor Somers asked Councilors to consider a one year renewable lease to allow development of a plan. She stated she is uncomfortable with a 30 year lease without a detailed plan.

Mr. Socha asked that a decision be made as quickly as possible. Although the plan is not detailed, the Fire District wants to make use of the property. He added that there is a termination clause in the lease.

Councilor O'Beirne asked for a list of alternatives if the Council decides not to accept Noank's plan.

2012-0133

Groton Open Space Association (GOSA) Request for Endorsement of Candlewood Ridge (Lambtown Road) Land Purchase

Discussed

Councilor O'Beirne disclosed that he is a member of GOSA, but not an officer.

Joan Smith, president of GOSA, distributed information to the Council. She requested endorsement of a grant application to DEEP to purchase land located on Lambtown Road and Route 184 known as Candlewood Ridge. The parcel consists of 91 acres and is 50% wetlands. Ms. Smith described the environment of the property, trails, flora, fauna, and endangered species.

She referenced a map of the property and adjacent properties. A cleared area of 10 acres will be restored to an early successional habitat. Ms. Smith passed around a survey of the northern parcel showing wetlands that is not suitable for development. The property will be an asset for the community for generations to come. Ms. Smith reviewed the importance of the Haley Brook watershed.

In response to a question from Councilor Watson, Ms. Smith stated there have been no archaeological excavations on the property, but GOSA would welcome it in the future. Councilor Watson indicated he would like to tour the property.

Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the Council decide on a site walk before deciding on whether or not to support the application. GOSA has also approached the Conservation Commission and Planning Commission for their support.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

Councilor Johnson asked what the public use will be. Ms. Smith stated the land will be open for recreation, trails, and horses, although that would have to be voted on by the GOSA Board. The trails are rugged, but useable for non-motorized transportation.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0135

Summer Food Service Program (2012)

Discussed

Joyce Sauchuk, Manager of Labor Relations/Risk Management, described the request for approval to enter into an agreement with the state to operate the Summer Food Service Program. Breakfast and lunch is served to children 18 or under at five sites around the Town. Approximately 5,000 meals were served last year. The city sites are run by City Parks and Recreation staff. The Town may explore extending the grant to adults.

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Watson, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0132

Crystal Lake Road Operational and Safety Improvements

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger provided a brief history of Crystal Lake Road, and the issues and concerns at the intersections and entrance to the Submarine Base. Conceptual designs have been engineered. SCCOG solicited regional road improvement projects and the reconstruction of Crystal Lake Road was ranked high by all communities. Due to the complexity of the project, additional information was required by DOT, which took some time. The plan is now in the project development stage at DOT and they are enthusiastic about the project. DOT requires the Town to hold a public information meeting in the next couple of weeks. A preliminary design map was distributed to the Council.

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, presented the design plan. He reviewed average daily traffic on Crystal Lake Road and at its intersections and noted 33 reported accidents at Route 12. The plan includes a 10' wide multi-use path accessible from 25% of Navy housing units. Planned retaining walls will require easements. The northbound lane of Military Highway will be realigned to line up with the main entrance to the Submarine Base and a new traffic signal will be installed. Crystal Lake Road will have four 12' travelways and two 4' shoulders. There will be radius improvements at Route 12. Minor drainage improvements are planned. There are four, four-unit apartment buildings on Crystal Lake Road. One building will be demolished and improved parking areas will be constructed to eliminate the need for traffic to back out into Crystal Lake Road. The project also includes relocation of utility poles. Total project cost is \$5,546,000. The state will purchase the Fusconi property and necessary easements for the project.

The Town Manager explained that 80% of the cost will be covered by a federal grant, 10% by the state, and 10% by the Town. The cost to do the intersection improvement and repave Crystal Lake Road to DOT standards alone would be about \$700,000. DOT's recommendation to move the project forward was to obtain SCCOG endorsement of the regional (federal grant) portion of the project. SCCOG's Executive Committee as endorsed the project and SCCOG will formally consider the item on May 16th. DOT believes that other funding is available to help offset costs. Construction is projected for 2015/2016 due to the amount of design work required. The Town Manager recommends the Town Council's endorsement.

Councilor O'Beirne feels this project will not impact military value at all in future BRAC rounds. With the exception of the main gate intersection improvements, Councilor O'Beirne is opposed to this project and feels there is no demonstrated need. The accident figures are relative and no comparison data from other areas was offered.

Mayor Somers noted the number of calls she receives from residents complaining about the condition of the road. Mr. Schneider reiterated that the design will address the underlying condition of the road and bring it up to standards for truck traffic.

Town Manager Oefinger stated that one purpose of the project is to provide a multi-modal path that will connect with the path just built on Pleasant Valley Road South. The path must be included in the project upfront or it will never be built. The Town can bid the path as an alternate after design. The path is designed to serve Navy housing.

Mr. Schneider directed the Council to DOT's cost estimates. Discussion followed.

Councilor Flax expressed support for the intersection improvements at the main gate.

The Town Manager explained that the project was originally submitted in four components, but DOT asked the Town to combine the projects. If the components are separated, there will be no funding assistance under this program.

Town Manager Oefinger expressed astonishment at the Council's discussion noting that his project has been identified regionally as a high priority. The project has been discussed for years and has been discussed with representatives of the Submarine Base.

Councilor O'Beirne expressed concern that the Council has not approved this project. Councilor Johnson stated that he has known about this project and he does not feel the Town can take the money from the state to purchase the Fusconi property, and then not do the entire project.

Councilor Schmidt asked about the existing sidewalk on Route 12. The Town Manager noted it is about 30 years old and is not a multi-purpose path.

The Town Manager asked the Council for direction. If the desire is to proceed with the project, the Town Council must schedule a public information meeting.

Mayor Somers expressed support for the project and noted that the intersection work and repaving will cost the Town more than the total project. The project was described in detail in the FYE 2012 CIP. Councilor Streeter expressed support for the project noting that the cost is more than expected, but the Town's contribution is worth it. Councilor Flax stated he does not recall discussion of the project. The Town Manager explained that the Council had not yet reviewed detailed plans, only the projects and cost estimates contained in previous CIP documents.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Streeter, to schedule a public information meeting on the Crystal Lake Road Operational and Safety Improvements project.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 7 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Opposed: 1 - Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

Discussed

Councilor O'Beirne asked if federal funds could be used for the Military Road/Crystal Lake Road intersection improvements. The Town Manager stated that singular project would not meet the intent of the funding, but he could check with SCCOG.

2012-0128 Small Cities Community Block Grant - 2012 Application

Discussed

Councilor O'Beirne left the meeting.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Peruzzotti

Discussed

Mike Murphy, Director of Planning and Development, described the request for a public hearing and authorization to apply for additional Community Development Block Grant funds. Susan Cullen, Planner II, distributed information on the program to the Council. The application is due by June 8th.

Town Manager Oefinger provided background on the Town's Community Development program. The Town must draw down its revolving fund before it can apply for additional funds. The public hearing is designed to solicit ideas for the next round of funding. Historically, the Town has used funds Community Development Block Grant funding for housing rehabilitation.

Discussed

Councilor Watson left the meeting.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson

Discussed

Mr. Murphy noted that administrative costs can be charged to the grant. Ms. Cullen provided a history of the Community Development Block Grant fund balance and the difficulties in reaching the \$25,000 threshold because it is a revolving fund. Updated guidelines were approved by the Town Council three years ago. Sixteen homes have been rehabilitated since Ms. Cullen took over the program and there is a long waiting list (25 people). Funding is used to improve housing to Building Code standards. The maximum annual request is \$300,000.

Possible dates for the public hearing are at a special meeting on May 29th or on June 5th.

Applications for funding are processed in the order they are received. No match is required. Ms. Cullen explained that loans are made and a lien placed on the property.

Discussed

Councilor Watson returned to the meeting.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Peruzzotti

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Antipas, to hold a public hearing on the Small Cities Community Block Grant 2012 Application.

The motion carried unanimously

2011-0218 Fitch High School Baseball Field - Update

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Johnson, to enter executive session at 9:37 p.m. to discussion 2011-0218 Fitch High School Baseball Field - Update, and to invite the Town Manager and Town Attorney Eileen Duggan to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

Councilor O'Beirne returned to the meeting and joined the executive session.

The executive session ended at 10:25 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Peruzzotti

2012-0049 Purchase of Fusconi Property, Crystal Lake Road

Discussed

The State Bond Commission has authorized funding to purchase the Fusconi property and the Town Manager is looking for authorization to proceed with the purchase.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Antipas, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0048 Purchase of Spicer Properties, Thomas Road

Discussed

The Town Manager noted that the RTM has not yet reviewed the open space account in the budget, which includes additional funding that will be put toward this purchase. This item was deferred to the next Committee of the Whole meeting.

2012-0040 Town Council Goal Setting

Discussed

A special meeting of the Committee of the Whole was scheduled for May 15th at 6:00 p.m. to discuss Town Council goals.

2012-0134 Board of Education Contract Negotiations

Discussed

Councilor Antipas and Mayor Somers stated they would like to attend the Teachers' Union negotiations.

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Town Manager Oefinger provided an update on the police study. Proposals have been submitted and will be reviewed to select firms for interviews.

Mayor Somers asked that the Permanent School Building Committee be invited to the next Committee of the Whole meeting to provide an update on their activities.

The Town Manager was asked to provide an update on the Mystic Streetscape Project to the Council.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Johnson, seconded by Councilor Flax, to adjourn the meeting at 10:32 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.